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To: State Policy Makers
From: Iowa State Police Officers Council
Sue Brown, Executive Director
Carl Fairley, Park Ranger Representative
Matt Veon, Treasurer Park Rangers Association
Re: Additional Full Time Park Rangers Must be Hired to Ensure the Publics' Safety
at Iowa's Parks and Recreation Areas

Each year, an estimated 14 million visitors look towards Iowa's State Parks for relaxation, adventure and fun. With increasing usage at the parks and recreational areas comes increasing problems or violations of the law that only peace officers can act upon. Along with the laws and regulations that govern state parks (461A), Park Rangers also enforce laws in the areas of; Fish and Wildlife Regulations, Traffic Laws, Alcohol Violations, possession of controlled or illegal substances, domestic assaults, burglaries and thefts, indecent exposures and disorderly conduct. In addition to the violations that Park Rangers are enforcing, Park Rangers also are called to respond to medical emergency calls, traffic accidents, boating and all-terrain accidents, hunting accidents, natural disasters, welfare calls, arson cases, suicide and/or attempted suicide situations.

In 1998, there were approximately 54 Park Rangers located throughout the state parks and recreational areas to perform all of these functions. Unfortunately, with the lack of park ranger positions being filled for a variety of budgetary reasons, that number will have shrunk to only 27 Park Rangers by the opening of the Parks this Spring. Even though the number of park rangers has been cut in half, the number of Iowans using the parks and the need for law enforcement interaction has increased during the same period of time. There are some state parks that have no peace officers present while many other parks have one Park Ranger instead of two.

This decrease in the number of Park Rangers has led to increased response times for law enforcement and emergency assistance calls and has led to an increase in the volume of incidents. The State Parks are generally in areas of the State with little or no close local law enforcement. Many Park Rangers are now being asked to patrol more than one park, sometimes traveling significant distances between the parks that they are covering. Also, with this level of staffing, many violations and calls for service have or will burden the county sheriff's departments, the Iowa State Patrol or the local police departments, all of whom are also already stretched to their limits. With a Park Ranger patrolling a park where an incident happens, there is a decreased response times that could prevent serious harm or death in an emergency. More importantly, if there is a Park Ranger patrolling a Park, the deterrence factor weighs in and fewer incidents occur in the first place. Vandalisms, underage drinking, noise complaints and physical altercations are just a few of the problems that have risen with no law enforcement presence.

We recognize the great value that seasonal employees and maintenance crews bring to the parks, however, if a decision has to be made between safety and cleanliness, it must be public safety. Just as

Iowa State Troopers Association * Iowa State Park Rangers Association * Iowa Dept. of Public Safety Special Agents Association
Iowa Fish & Game Conservation Officers Association * Iowa Gaming Enforcement Officers' Association * Iowa State Fire Marshals' Association



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the State of Iowa is expected to provide law enforcement for its roadways and highways, the citizens of the State of Iowa expect and should be afforded adequate law enforcement protection while they enjoy our state parks and recreational areas.

Right now, there are 11 Park Ranger vacancies. The following parks do not have any Park Ranger assigned: Bellevue State Park, Lake Anita, Geode State Park in Lowell, Big Creek State Park in Polk City, Brushy Creek in Fort Dodge, Dolliver State Park in Fort Dodge, Pine Lake in Eldora, Honey Creek State Park in Moravia, Honey Creek Resort in Moravia, Lake Ahquabi in Indianola and Red Haw State Park in Chariton. This list doesn't include the Parks that should have two Park Rangers but only have one.

We understand that this legislative session, we may not be able to obtain the funding to be able to put Park Rangers into all of these positions, however the most critical of the Parks to have staffing are: Big Creek, Brushy Creek and Dollivar, Honey Creek and Lake Ahquabi. If we could secure designated funding for four new Park Rangers, we would be able to cover these Parks for this year and then seek additional funding next year for the other positions that we need. It costs approximately \$65,000 for a new Park Ranger (starting salary is \$44,304, benefits are approximately \$10-\$15,000, and the cost of the academy training is about \$6,000). Therefore, the cost for the four new Park Rangers that we are seeking is approximately \$260,000.

We greatly appreciate your support and any assistance that you can give us.